

PARTNERSHIP

In October 2000, the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) and the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) formalized, through a Memorandum of Understanding, a partnership to help communities across the nation "plan, design, and manage their natural, cultural, and recreation resources."

RTCA is a partnership program of the National Park Service with offices throughout the country. The Pacific Northwest office serves Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. RTCA staff work with community groups and local, state and other federal programs to conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. The program helps local coalitions develop concept plans, build partnerships to achieve community-set goals, engage the public's imagination, and identify potential sources of funding. All RTCA projects are result-oriented, with an emphasis on community initiative, cost-sharing, and cooperation.

The mission of the American Society of Landscape Architects is to lead, to educate and to participate in the careful stewardship, wise planning and artful design of our cultural and natural environments. Landscape architects strive to realize a balance among preservation, use and management of the country's resources. Members of ASLA have volunteered their skills, individually and as part of the organization's community stewardship programs, to many projects throughout the nation, such as neighborhood playgrounds and gardens, Habitat for Humanity, and environmental education.

The RTCA/ASLA partnership provides landscape architects with opportunities to work with communities and raise public awareness about their profession through pro bono technical assistance on RTCA conservation and recreation projects. In turn, RTCA is able to sponsor professional design expertise otherwise unavailable or unaffordable in these community-based efforts.

Transforming the national agreement into regional action, members of the Oregon Chapter of ASLA (OR ASLA) joined forces with the RTCA/Pacific Northwest office for their inaugural partnership project in Keizer, Oregon in 2006. Both organizations look forward to many more successful partnerships.

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KEIZER RAPIDS PARK

2006 COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP

Rivers, Trails & Conservation
Assistance Program
National Park Service
...
Pacific Northwest



American Society of
Landscape Architects
...
Oregon Chapter

"Buying a piece of riverfront property and setting it aside for perpetuity is one of the best things you could possibly have done."

Robin Hostick, ASLA, Eugene, OR



"This is the kind of thing that comes around very rarely in people's lives... Charrette participants should be able to look back someday and tell their children and grand-children that they had a hand in something great."

Nate Brown, City Planner, City of Keizer

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Neighborhoods, small towns, and community groups sometimes face planning or design challenges that they are unable to meet due to a lack of expertise, funding, or other resources. The partnership between RTCA and OR ASLA lets communities benefit from the pairing of RTCA's organizational and planning skills and the technical design skills of OR ASLA's landscape architects.

One of the most effective vehicles for producing ideas with limited time and resources is the *design charrette*. A charrette is typically an intensive, illustrated brainstorming session that involves any number of people and lasts from a few hours to a few days. Traditionally it dates from the early 1900s at the Ecole des Beaux Arts,

in Paris, where professors would send a cart (charrette) around to pick up students' work at the submission deadline. Some students, frantic to complete their drawings, would jump on the cart as it rolled down the street, hence, working "*en charrette*."



In preparation for a community design charrette, RTCA works with project partners to organize the event and define the goals for generating design ideas and potential solutions for their recreation or conservation project. During the charrette, OR ASLA design professionals, teamed with local community experts, work to quickly grasp project challenges and craft visual design solutions. The objective is high creativity and productivity. No ideas are discarded due to impracticality or questionable details. These are decisions for the community to make later, after the design professionals have returned home, and ideas are moved forward from within the community.

The image of frantic, last minute drawing (sometimes described as "organized chaos") is still characteristic at today's charrettes, particularly since participants typically present the ideas they generate during the charrette at a public forum of some kind. It is here, at this final charrette wrap-up, where the synergy of the work between outside professionals and local experts is highlighted and handed-off to the larger community.

Inside is a "snapshot" of how RTCA and OR ASLA helped the community of Keizer, Oregon envision its future riverfront park....

KEIZER RAPIDS PARK



A COMMUNITY DESIGN EVENT

The City of Keizer only recently incorporated to address the population pressures from its southern neighbor, Salem (the capitol city of Oregon State). Even though Keizer lies on the eastern bank of the Willamette River, it holds no City-owned river access; residents can reach the river only through private land or by leaving town. In 2002, The City began seeking park and open space land along the river. After receiving an 85-acre long-term lease from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department on an undeveloped parcel and finding a willing landowner, the City formed the a task force comprised of local citizens, City and County employees, and adjacent landowners. The task force, known as Regional Intergovernmental Visions Enhancing River Resources (RIVERR), worked with the Trust for Public Land and Marion County to purchase another 28 acres to create a 113 acre park just on the edge of its urban growth boundary. Funding totaling over \$1.7 million, from numerous sources such as the State of Oregon, Marion County and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, were secured to pay for the 28-acre parcel, and the vision for Keizer Rapids Park was launched.

In 2004, The City of Keizer applied for and received technical assistance from the Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) of the National Park Service to develop a concept plan for the newly acquired site. RTCA worked with RIVERR to go through a public planning process that included a community-based questionnaire distributed via the City's monthly utility bill as well as available in City Hall and on the project's website. RIVERR completed a comprehensive site inventory and regional recreation needs assessment that, combined with the questionnaire, helped RIVERR prioritize what recreation elements or amenities should be included in a park design plan.

The Charrette

In the spring of 2006, the city of Keizer hosted a weekend charrette facilitated by RTCA and the Oregon Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (OR ASLA). Charrette participants convened on Friday night for a guided walking tour of the park site and barbeque dinner that allowed for further park-related discussion. On Saturday morning, participants gathered for an orientation breakfast at the Whittenberg Inn. Six teams were formed of four to five community members each and charged with developing a site design based upon assigned characteristics and park elements. Team assignments ranged from designing a park with an "open-space" feel, to planning a more "developed" site with amenities like ballfields and a dog park. Two landscape architects from OR ASLA worked with each team to facilitate decisions and guide them on development of their design.



"It was phenomenal, and the landscape architects were great. We could not have done this without them."

Keizer Mayor
Lore Christopher



Teams worked hard throughout the day with a break for lunch allowing team members to discuss their morning's work and refuel for the final push. In the later part of the afternoon, teams began to finalize their designs and make them presentable to the public. Over 125 people from around the town of Keizer came to the charrette open house where the six different teams presented their ideas and proposals. After the presentation, open house attendees mingled with team members to discuss their designs and design process. In addition, the public was asked to fill out a questionnaire to help the City select the final design for Keizer Rapids Park.

The site inventory uncovered many environmental constraints including the site's flood-plain location and wetlands. The public scoping component of the project demonstrated numerous different desired uses competing for limited space at the park. The challenge was fitting together these uses in a design that worked for the public as well as being sensitive to the natural resources.

The spatial design skills of landscape architects were well suited for solving this dilemma. RTCA and the City of Keizer partnered with OR ASLA to host a design charrette that would allow user group representatives, community members, the RIVERR task force, adjacent landowners, and other key stakeholders to work together to generate different potential park designs that the public could embrace and help shape the final plan for what could become one of Keizer's most treasured places.

RESULTS



Building on the momentum of the charrette, the RIVERR task force was able to finalize a design by incorporating the input from the open house and shopping around the designs to stakeholder groups. Less than three months after the design charrette, the City of Keizer formerly adopted the Keizer Rapids Park Plan into their comprehensive plan. Shortly thereafter, Marion County also approved the plan. The City is now moving forward with the task of making the community's vision a reality.

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